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Considerations on the Philatelic Testimony of the Maramureș Mining Activity (I)

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Authors ALP and BVC designed the study, performed the literature searches and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author MC managed the analyses of the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that on the entire territory of Maramureş County (Romania), from East to West, there were and still are important deposits of gold-silver and copper ores, as well as lead and zinc ores. The geological and geomorphological specificity of the Maramures mining area meant that over time the mining activity did not go unnoticed in the annals of history, as well as in those of thematic philately. The philatelic movement in Maramures County, especially in Baia Mare, has an old tradition. This tradition has particularly followed mining activity. Through this paper, in order to

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pay a tribute to the forerunners, we set out to review the beginnings of the Maramures philatelic movement which had as its subject the mining activity, with emphasis on philatelic materials (stamps, first-day covers, occasional and special envelopes, postcards and maxims, etc.) that have aimed at promoting the natural heritage, and local and regional geodiversity. From the analyzed materials, some reproduced even in these pages, it was found that special attention was paid and still is paid to the mining activity in the Maramures region, collectors of philatelic materials being themselves involved in mining and related activities, as well as in promoting geodiversity in-country and abroad.

Keywords: Geolog; mining in Maramures; postal circulations; the first philatelic testimony.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Maramureș region has been a mining basin, that directly falls into the field of geology, since the time of the Roman Empire. The philatelic movement in this region of Romania, especially in Baia Mare, which in the previous years was a natural tradition, has an old tradition. Since the beginning of the last century, the existence of groups of philatelists holding exchange meetings was recorded. Also in the same period, a philatelic magazine appeared in Baia Mare, considered to be a valuable directory for postage stamp collectors. In its pages, it was shown a high level of interest of local philatelists to the activity and lives of miners, which influenced them to make appropriate stamps, first-day covers (FDCs), special and occasional envelopes, postcards and maxims, etc.

After the reunification of Romania in 1918, especially after the middle of the last century, the philately experienced a real development, gaining a mass character over a period that lasted until 1995. In 1956, the first philatelic group was established in Baia Mare, under the patronage of the Club of Metallurgical Plants for Nonferrous Metals. In the immediate period after, new philatelic groups were set up in Baia Mare, Sighetu Marmaiei, Vişeu, and Borşa.

In 1970, the philatelic circles of Baia Sprie and Cavnic were established. Throughout this period, philatelic circles for youth and students were established in almost every educational institution. Unfortunately, after the Revolution of 1989, interest in philately gradually disappeared, especially among the "young free". New technological development, poor management by leading stakeholders in Romanian philately, and the inflation that afflicted Romania for many years led the youths to quickly move away from collecting postage stamps and philatelic effects. Only nostalgics and few of those who began to rediscover this passion after their teenage years remained.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present work aims to make a foray into time and bring to light cracks from the old philatelic activity that existed in our county. We stopped, this time, after addressing the implications of philately in ecological education and promoting protected natural areas [1-3], the implications of philately with the ecological house, architecture and traditional crafts [4-7], and the implications of philately on mining activity [8-10], which have been prominent topics of discussion in publications on mining. Indeed, Maramures for several generations was a rich mining basin with a specific geology. The oldest term of the geological formations is represented by crystalline schists covering most of the Maramures Mountains - a reality well exploited by native philatelists. So this article pays tribute to the forerunners by presenting stamps, postcards, occasional envelopes, advertising stamps, and other philatelic effects (from platforms such as Colnect, Delcampe, PicClick, StampWorld, etc) that we have managed to identify and which we have arranged chronologically.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Philatelic Earliest Records of Maramureș Mining Activity

During the period November 7-17, 1951, in Baia Mare, the first philatelic exhibition in the county, hed to celebrate "Miner's Day" was organized. With this exhibition, an occasional envelope (see Fig. 1) was published by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications through the P.T.T. Regional of Baia Mare [11,12]. It is worth mentioning that, after the exhibition in Constanța in July of the same year, the exhibition hosted in Baia Mare was the second philatelic exhibition in the country. For the creation of this philatelic piece, the first one with this theme addressed in our county has used the image used to make the

Fig. 1. Occasional envelope - 7-17.11.1951 - "Philatelic exhibition" in Baia Mare

envelope "the first day" (First Day Cover - FDC) of the issue "Miner's Day" appeared on August 12, 1951. This time the color of the pattern was red, and the legends were changed.

For stamping, the stamps of the same issue were used (placed in the upper right corner) [13-15] to which was added the stamp with the nominal value of 2 lei from the "Five Year Plan" issue (LP #292) [16] representing the extraction of coal. The postage thus obtained was purely philatelic so that the nominal value was not placed under any of the postal tariffs in effect at that date. The round stamp of the exhibition was applied in black ink, having as a central graphic element, the chisel and hammer which are the symbols of mining.

On the occasion of the Philatelic Exhibition in Baia Mare, which took place from October 6 to November 20, 1952, a maximum postcard was made [17,18] (see Fig. 2). The illustration was stamped with the complete series of stamps "Miner's Day" (LP #328) [13,19,20], published on August 15, 1952, and obliterated with the special stamp of the philatelic event. The supporting illustration, printed in sepia, represents the "Miner" statue displayed in front of the former building belonging to the Baia Mare Technical Middle School of Minerals. According to an article published by Cătălin Vischi in eMaramureș [21], on October 16, 2011, the statue, belonging to the Maramures sculptor Vida Gheza, had been unveiled on August 12, 1951, in Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej Square (hereafter referred to as Victoria Square, but which is now widely known as Revolution Square).

Seven years later (August 9, 1958) it was replaced with a similar work that exists today. We invite you to find out, by reading the article mentioned in the bibliography [21], why the two statues were changed and what is the mystery around them. The postage is also a purely philatelic one. It keeping the theme of the exhibition, the resulting nominal value not being under the postal rates in effect at that date. The round stamp of the exhibition was applied in brown ink, without graphic elements, with the period of the exhibition mentioned centrally.

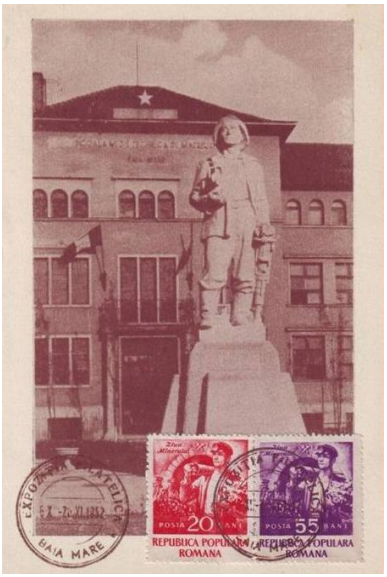


Fig. 2. Maximum postcard - "Philatelic Exhibition" in Baia Mare - November 6-20, 1952

In trying to find more information about the "Maramureș philatelic exhibition (1944-1969)", we were able to identify only the two occasional envelopes presented in (Fig. 3) [22,23]. In the semi-illustration of the envelopes we find a stylized graphic of an entrance to the mine (wagons), the scaffolding of an extraction well, and in the background of the "Stefan Tower", the emblem of Baia Mare. In the foreground is sketched the image of a Maramureş miner.

The view of the stamps is obstructed by the label "25th anniversary of the liberation of the homeland" (LP #707) published on August 23, 1969 - and this time the stamp is a purely philatelic one. The stamp of the exhibition was applied in two shades of ink (black and red). The envelopes were numbered and the print run was high (if we rely on the number of characters in the counter - probably somewhere around 10,000 copies).

As in any traditional mining town, in Cavnic there was an ancient mining band. In olden days, on holidays and Sundays, in the Lighet Park (where there are now blocks of flats - Independence Street) the band sang for those who went for a walk. The Miner's Day was celebrated with great honor on the band's agreements [24]. The event is marked on August 6, when the miners commemorate the ortaces killed during the Lupeni strike, from 1929 [25,26]. This strike was the first major collective action to protest by the workers.

The objective of the protesters was to obtain better working conditions, better pay, protective equipment, and some facilities to underground workers and their families which would ensure their survival. However, the strike degenerated into numerous acts of violence, which resulted in the killing of over 20 workers and many others being injured. Since then, the day of August 6 officially became the Day of the miner, according to Agerpres, to commemorate the victims who sacrificed themselves in the struggle to obtain better working conditions. Also, the victims of the numerous accidents in mines are commemorated. At the same time, Miner's Day promotes the preservation and perpetuation of the customs of the mining community. Today, however, the Miner's Day is no longer respected in the official calendar [27]. It is observed only in a fleeting moment by a few who then return to current affairs.

The first philatelic exhibition in Cavnic ("Miner's Day 1970") was organized by the newly established philatelic club in the locality, under the aegis of the Association of Philatelists of Romania (AFR), the county subsidiary of Maramureș, between 3-15 August 1970. The anniversary envelope (see Fig. 4) [28-32], shows in semi-illustration a mining wagon loaded with ore coming out of a mine at the foot of the Gutâi mountains, next to a stylized portrait of the Maramureş miner.

The envelope was stamped with the stamp of the show "Victory on Fascism" (LP #727) which appeared on May 9, 1970, and was obliterated by the day stamp of the Cavnic Post Office on August 3, 1970. The exhibition stamp in which the miner's face appears in the illustration of the occasional envelope was presented in a complementary black ink, next to the AFR logo. Established in 1970, the Baia Sprie Philatelic Circle has enjoyed from the beginning an active and creative collection. In this context, even in the second year of existence, the group holds its first philatelic exhibition, which took place on May 1-25, 1971. The occasional envelope of Fig. 5 [33] presents in semi-illustration a convoy of ore wagons loaded at the mouth of the mine in the city of Baia Sprie, having above them a laurel wreath that fits the party flag (PCR), as well as the text "May 8, 1921-1971". It is printed using two colours for the first time in Maramures.

The exhibition was also celebrated by the anniversary of the semicentennial P.C.R. (hence the graphic elements used), when stamping the philatelic pieces made using the stamps of the show launched on May 8, 1971 (LP #764). The postage stamps were replaced with the stamp of the Post Office in Baia Sprie on 08.05.1971. Interesting to mention is that at the time of launching the issue, stamps were already available to Maramureş philatelists. The stamp of the exhibition was complementarily applied, using red ink, in the central area of the envelope.

The philatelic activity in the municipality of Baia Mare had become a rich one at the beginning of the '70s. The Baia Mare philatelists occupying places on the podium at several competitions and exhibitions organized at national level. At the beginning of 1972, the number of philatelists on the banks of the Domnițelor River had far exceeded the value of 700 active members. Therefore the philatelic activity of the Maramureș County Branch of A.F.R. was successfully held in several well-organized circles and clubs. One of these clubs, which was noted for its exceptional

activity, was entitled "Săsar Club". Most of its members were miners at the Săsar mine and employees of the Mining Research Institute. It was a true philatelic group whose passion and devotion paid off, with new memberships becoming more and more frequent.

(a) variant A

(b) variant B

Fig. 3. Two occasional envelopes from the 1969 Maramures philatelic exhibition

Fig. 4. Envelope - The First Philatelic Exhibition in Cavnic, "Miner's Day - 1970"

Fig. 5. Occasional envelope made at the Baia Sprie Philatelic Circle Exhibition in 1971

In 1972, on December 30, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Republic's establishment (1947-1972), the club organizes the first edition of the exhibition "The philatelic school of the Săsar Club". The occasional envelope (see Fig. 6) [34,35], printed in color (in three colors), has the legend "Anniversary of the Republic / 1947 / XXV / 1972", and in the graphic composition is the symbol of the two flags (one having the red of the party and the other the tricolor), the "Stefan" tower, a stamped corner in which the image of two young philatelists are reproduced, as well as the emblem with the chisel, the hammer and the candle of the miner (the reason why we selected this piece in the theme of our work). In the central, upper part, the philatelic piece has the stamp, in black ink, with the description "First exhibition / The philatelic school of the Săsar Club / 30.12.1972 / Baia Mare", having as a graphic element a stamp of rhomboidal form.

For stamping, the mark with the nominal value of 55 bani was used in the program "The XXV anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic" (LP #813), published on December 10, 1972, which was replaced by with the stamp of the Baia Mare Post Office, on 30.12.1972.

Work and sport have, not infrequently, been linked for long periods. Almost every company in the county had in its organizational scheme a sports club in which the employees could enjoy recreational activities. Even mining operations did not depart from this "rule", and there were many mining teams occupying top positions in the leagues. In 1980, from July 21st to 28th in the stadium "August 23" in Baia Mare, the "International Football Tournament Miners' Cup" tournament was held. On this occasion, the philatelists made an advertising stamp that was applied to the post office specially opened inside the stadium on July 28. Those who wished could send correspondence or obtain or make philatelic pieces with the special stamp. In the following Figures, we reproduce some pieces we found. We chose to include this stamp in our theme because the word "MINER" appears in the stamped legend, and the chisel and hammer were used in the graphic element - symbols specific to the mining activity. The image of the "August 23" Stadium in Baia Mare was used to create two special envelopes that bore the occasional stamp. The first variant (A) shows the stadium on a white background (Fig. 7a) [36,37], while the second variant (B) presents the semi-illustration on a yellow background (Fig. 7b) [38].

Variant A was stamped with the nominal value of 1.20 lei with the coat of arms of Baia Mare Municipality, a piece published in 1979 (LP #994), while variant B was stamped using the stamp with the 20-money denomination of the "10 years" issue. of cosmonautics "(LP #642), a piece published on February 10, 1967. In Fig. 8 [39] the stamp was applied to an entire postcard (code 0119/1978), not circulated, issued on the occasion of the World Football Championship in Argentina. The envelope is part of a series of six pieces, with the fixed mark of 55 money representing the cup of the world football championship on a yellow background. The sale price of the entire post office was 1 leu.

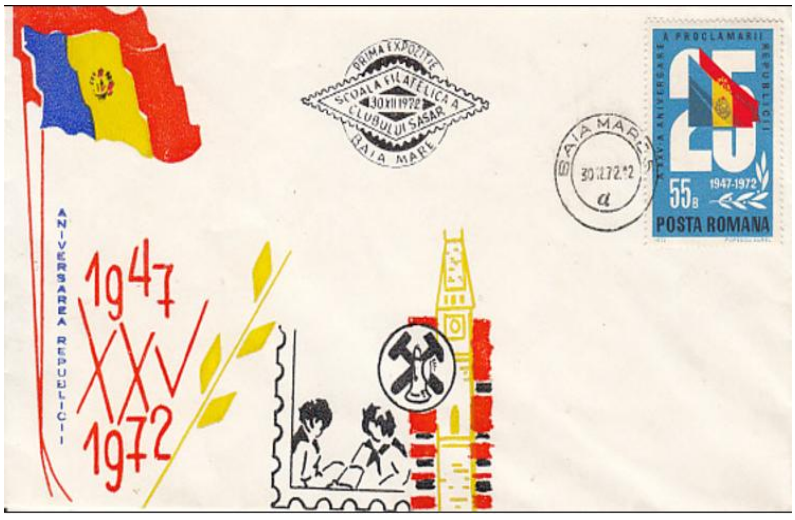


Fig. 6. Occasional envelope made by the Săsar Philatelic Club from Baia Mare in 1972

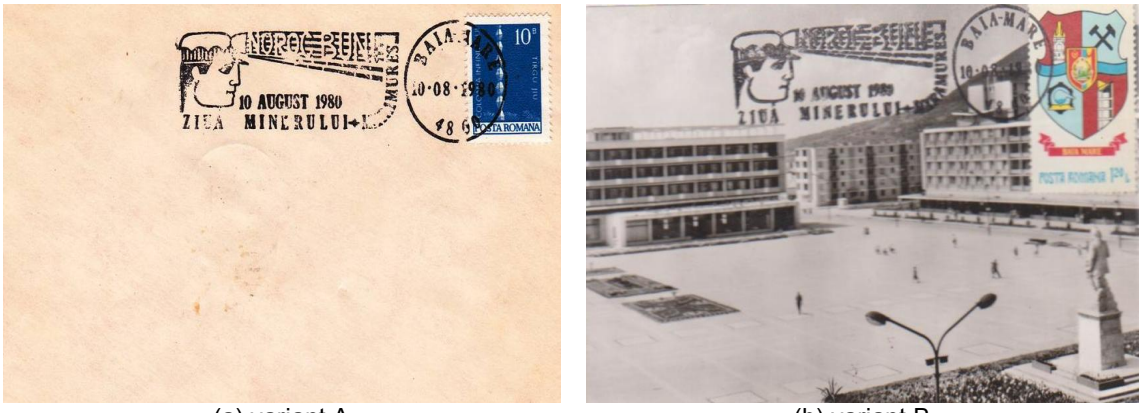
(a) variant A (b) variant B

Fig. 7. Occasional envelope - Minerul Cup 1980, Baia Mare

Fig. 8. Special stamp applied to the entire postcard of W.C. of Argentina football 1978

The Maramureş philatelists celebrated, in 1980, the "Miner's Day" on several "working fronts". Thus the philatelic groups from Baia Mare, Cavnic, and Băiuț (those identified by us) have made thematic anniversary stamps that were applied to the post offices in the respective localities on August 10th. The philatelic group from Baia Mare made a stamp depicting the face of a miner wearing a helmet, and the text "NOROC GUN" is inscribed on its luminous beam. In the lower part appears the legend "10 AUGUST 1980 / MINER DAY - MARAMUREȘ".

In Fig. 9a [40] we rendered the image of an envelope "in white" which was crossed with the stamp of 10 bani from the usual program "Monuments" (LP #837) published on December 15, 1973, representing the infinity column from Târgu Jiu of the great sculptor Constantin Brâncuși. Others, more daring, tried to achieve a maximum (Fig. 9b) [41] using as a support a black and white postcard, which, in the right-front plane, displays the "Miner statue" (rear view). As a postmark, they used the stamp with the coat of arms of the municipality of Baia Mare, which presents as thematic elements the chisel and the hammer. Both pieces were obliterated with the stamp made by the Baia Mare philatelists.



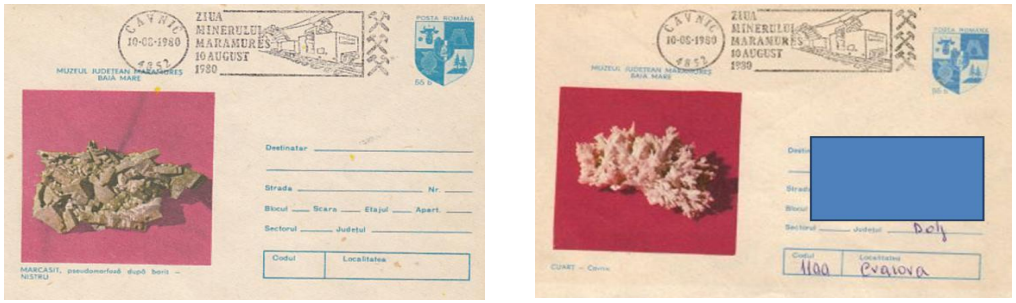
(a) variant A (b) variant B

Fig. 9. A special stamp applied to different philatelic products, Baia Mare post office

At the Cavnic, a stamp was designed in which an electrically operated mine train can be observed. The legend "ZIUA / MINERULUI / MARAMUREȘ / 10 AUGUST / 1980" is aligned on the left side of the graphic box, being bordered by the chiseled pair and the hammer arranged three times, vertically, on the right. The first piece identified (Fig. 10a) [42] by us bears the special stamp applied on the entire postcode 0437/1976, a series of 12 semi-illustrated envelopes with samples from the Maramureș County Museum - Baia Mare. The present piece (with a fixed stamp with the name of 55 bani and the sale price 1 leu) presents a beautiful specimen of marcasite, a pseudomorphosis after baritone, extracted from the Nistru mine.

The second piece identified (see Fig. 10b) [43] bears the special stamp applied to the entire postcode 0443/1976, from the same series dedicated to the Maramureș County Museum in Baia Mare. The present piece presents a semi-illustration of a quartz sample, extracted from the Cavnic mine.

In Fig. 11a [44] we have reproduced a letter circulated from Cavnic to Brad (Hunedoara County), in which the stamp of the event was used as a "day stamp" for postage stamps. The piece reached its destination on August 12 (after two days), as can be seen on the arrival stamp applied on the back of the envelope. The stamp used to stamp the correspondence is the one that present the coat of arms of the county of Maramureș from the usual program "The coat of arms of the counties from R.S. Romania "(LP #942) published on September 5, 1977. And this stamp is in the specifics of the mining theme because in the upper right corner an entrance to the mine is illustrated. Even in Băiuț there were events organized for this occasion. The stamp applied here presents a mine lamp framed by the legend "MINER'S DAY / MARAMUREȘ / 10-AUGUST-1980" and bordered, on the right, by the symbol of the chisel and the hammer. In Fig. 11b [45] we find a letter circulated from Băiuț to Brad bearing the special stamp of the event. This letter also reached its destination in two days. For those who were curious to follow the sources cited, they could see that the last two reproductions circulated have the same sender Dobra Ioan - a Baia Mare philatelist of the time. Perhaps readers who do not know the Maramures area very well will wonder how this person managed to be in two locations at the same time.



(a) variant A (b) variant B

Fig. 10. A special stamp applied to different philatelic products, Cavnic post office

(a) Cavnic - Brad circulated envelope (b) Băiuț - Brad circulated envelope

Fig. 11. Different envelopes with the occasional stamp

(a) variant A (b) variant B

Fig. 12. A special stamp applied on entire postcards published in 1976-1979

During summertime between the two localities, there is a 23 km road open to traffic (DJ 109F) over the Rotunda pass. It is a difficult road, with many curves which unfortunately not properly maintained but has a wonderful landscape. However, under the conditions it offers, this road allows you to travel the distance between the two localities in about 42 minutes (that is if you are "lucky" to not break your car there), avoiding a detour of almost 96 kilometres via Baia Mare - Târgu Lăpuș (where it normally runs in winter, when DJ 109F is closed to traffic).

The second piece found bearing the stamp of the stamp presented here was found on the entire postcard (code 0418/1979) reproduced in Fig. 12a [46]. The envelope is part of a series of six values, with the fixed mark of 55 bani and the sale price of 1 lei, realized on the occasion of the anniversary of "2000 years of documentary-archaeological attestation of the mining operations in the Barza - Brad area". In Fig. 12b [47] we find a special stamp applied to the entire postcard (code 0447/1976) dedicated to the Maramureș County Museum, Baia Mare. The semi-illustration shows a quartz sample, extracted from the Cavnic mine.

Every year, "Miner's Day" would not be celebrated on the same date. For example, in 1982 it was to be celebrated, at Cavnic, on August 8. This time the stamp (Fig. 13) [48] was to bear the artistic signs of an artist passionate about the abstract. The connection between the stylization of the mineral and the legend of the stamp "Cavnic / August 08, 1982, / Day / Miner / Maramureș" was made in interlocking boxes, the circle with the date and the place of the shipment being located on the right, with the role of forgetting the stamp with which it was equipped.

Because on the anniversary date a letter "other localities" up to 20 grams was charged with 2 lei, the Maramureş philatelists chose to use the postmark from the usual issue (LP #662) that reproduces the image of a postal truck. The envelope shown above bears, on the left side, the day stamp of the Cavnic post office.

Fig. 13. Envelope with the stamp "Miner Maramures Day 1982", Cavnic

4. CONCLUSION

We are aware that the stamps presented in this paper represent only a small part of the work that the Maramureş philatelists have done in this topic of our thematic philately. Even though we were able to identify a number of other pieces, the time did not allow us to classify them or for most of them we did not find bibliographic information in order to be able to associate them with any major event to support it. However, we are asking readers that if there is any of them who knows or has more information about this beautiful branch of Maramureş philatelic history and who wants to share his knowledge to do a collaboration with us.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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